

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## Luke's Gospel: The Seventy sent out (Luke 10:1-20)

Once upon a time, for that is the way all good stories start, Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about service. So He decided to climb up a mountain. There was a pile of stones nearby and He told the disciples to choose one and carry it to the top. Peter, being Peter, jumped in first and picked up the smallest stone for the day was hot and the mountain high. Poor Andrew was left with a large boulder to carry! Once they got to the top, they sat down and Jesus turned the stones they had carried into a similar size picnic. Peter starved, whilst Andrew feasted! The day wore on and it was getting dark, so Jesus told His disciples it was time to go back down the mountain. Again there was a pile of stones, and Jesus wanted the disciples to carry one each back down with them. Peter had learnt his lesson so immediately picked up the biggest stone, leaving Andrew with only a tiny pebble. When they reached the bottom, Jesus told the disciples to throw their stones into the river. Peter was drenched but Andrew was hardly splashed! When Peter complained, Jesus then turned round to him and asked him for whom he had been carrying the stones.

This story is only a pretend story, of course, but that is still the question that we need to ask ourselves this morning as we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke. Today we will look at Luke 10:1-20. Here we read about Jesus sending out the seventy disciples to prepare for a personal visit from the Lord Himself. They too would learn some invaluable lessons about service. We will look at these verses under five headings:

1. The servant follows the Master's plan (Luke 10:1-4);
2. The servant accepts the Master's provision (Luke 10:5-7);
3. The servant issues the Master's proclamation (Luke 10:8-12);
4. The servant shares the Master's pain (Luke 10:13-16); and
5. The servant receives the Master's praise (Luke 10:17-20).

### 1. The servant follows the Master's plan (Luke 10:1-4)

Let us begin then by looking at Luke 10:1-4: *"After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road'"* (Luke 10:1-4).

Jesus had been teaching His disciples about humility and the cost of following Him. It was *"after these things"* that He sent out a group of seventy servants to prepare the towns and villages that Jesus intended to visit Himself. Their task was to proclaim the coming King and call the people to repentance in much the same way that John the Baptist had been doing. None of these disciples are named for us and that in itself is instructive. You see, in the Master's service, the servant is not the important person - it is the Master who is all important. I think that this has a message for 21st Century Christianity. We live in an age of celebrity and this tendency can easily creep into our thinking. We go to hear one preacher because he is famous, or because we like his style. We go to one church because it is where all the "in" people go. We run a mission and we headline the evangelist. The only person that matters is the Master, and if we are to serve Him faithfully then we should be happy to remain without a name for ourselves.

We should just comment on the number of servants sent out. Some versions tell us 70 others 72. I do not think we need to worry which it was, but it is interesting that in Numbers 11:16-17 and Numbers 11:25, when the burden of leading the people became too great for Moses alone, God told him to select 70 elders to *"bear the burdens of the people."* God's spirit came down upon them and they were equipped for the work. Now there were two others in the camp, who had not gone up to the tabernacle upon whom the Spirit fell and who started to prophesy. So there is a remarkable parallel between what we read in Numbers and the situation in Luke 10. Jesus was clearly sending His servants out to *"bear the burdens"* of the people and to proclaim the coming kingdom.

Jesus Himself appointed His servants to go and preach. The word used for "appoint" in the original Greek is found only here and in Acts 1:24. Do we realise that Jesus personally chooses His servants to do His work? And it is only Jesus who can appoint His servants. A different Greek word is used in Acts 6:3 and Titus 1:5 where other Christians are told to recognise those that God has already chosen. In our service for the Lord Jesus, we do not serve because

someone has asked us to do something, but because Jesus Himself has chosen us to do the “*good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:10).

We should also note that they are sent out in twos. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, tell us “*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him.*” Twice as many people could have been reached if they had gone out on their own, but then in God's work the people are more important than the work. His shepherd care would put the well being of His servants before goals and targets!

Can you imagine going into a boardroom meeting and giving a presentation that mirrored Luke 10:1-4?! Who in their right mind would send out their workers as lambs amongst wolves, without preparation or visible resource? You would probably be sacked! And yet these servants had all that they needed - the Master's commission. I am not for one moment suggesting that we should not use commonsense in our service, but we can be assured that God's work, done in God's way will never lack for God's resource. His call is His enabling. What Luke 10:1-4 teach us is that God's work does not depend upon our ability and greatness - just the opposite. “*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty*” (1 Corinthians 1:27). These servants whom Jesus was sending out would be dramatic examples of this and so in leaving behind all human comforts, they were “*laying aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares*” so they could “*run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (Hebrews 12:1). In not even greeting those they met on the road they were focussed on their mission. The Master's business cannot wait as they “*redeemed the time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:16).

## **2. The servant accepts the Master's provision (Luke 10:5-7)**

*“But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the labourer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house”* (Luke 10:5-7).

It is important to remember that these instructions to the seventy were in relation to the Lord's earthly ministry. The coming king was being proclaimed and He had come to set up His kingdom. As John 1:11 tells us: “*He came unto His own [things] and His own [people] did not receive Him.*” Had they done so then Jesus would have set up His earthly kingdom straightaway, but then Calvary would never have happened. That said, we can learn from Luke 10:1-20 some useful principles that do apply to us today, and here we see that God always provides for His work. These seventy had no money and nowhere to stay but God would provide for all their needs as they arose. For sure, the more nervous and organised of the seventy might have preferred to know the full itinerary before setting out, having rooms booked in every town etc. but this is not the way that God works. He provides what it is needed when it is needed. There is no faith required in setting out on His service when we know that everything that we will need is all in place and He is no longer required!

The servants were to be content with what the Lord had provided for them - not moving from one house to another looking for a better meal and a comfier bed. Naturally speaking, we may want a bigger work for the Lord, or a more public ministry. We want more recognition or a larger congregation, but Jesus would teach us to be content with what He provides, and to faithfully serve Him where He has put us. Who indeed are we “*carrying the stones for*”?

## **3. The servant issues the Master's proclamation (Luke 10:8-12)**

*“Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city”* (Luke 10:8-12)

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus gave us a very special promise: “*I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*” This is what is still going on today. He is building His church in His way for it is His work. For sure, He involves us in this but as servants of the Master, we do need to remember that it is His church, His work. Sometimes we lose sight of this. We feel personally responsible for the outcome of what we do. If a particular service comes to an end it must be because we have failed. Have you ever watched a house being built? We often took our little boy to watch the diggers. Sometimes the builders would work on the walls and progress looked rapid. At other times they worked inside and you could hardly see anything being done. Just because not much is being done where I am serving does not mean the Master is not building His house - the work is being done elsewhere. Once a wall is built, it no longer requires the same level of activity.

The message was the same wherever they went - *"the kingdom of God has come near to you"* (Luke 10:9). That would not change to suit the town or village that the seventy had been sent to. Just because a town rejected the message, the servants were not to change the preaching to one that might be more likely to get a better response. They were not to play a numbers game - what mattered most was the number of people that could be signed up as "likes". Today we are to preach the Gospel as revealed to us in the New Testament. If people respond to it and are saved this is a wonderful cause for joy. If they do not, we do not change the Gospel to suit their needs. They had a message given to them from Jesus and that was what they were to preach.

When we come to the end of this story we will see that some accepted the message and responded to it. Others did not. This is the nature of being a servant on the Master's business. Perhaps some met with great success whilst others found only a hard hearted rejection. No matter, provided all was done for Him! There is no sign in Luke 10:1-20 that some of the servants were received more favourably because they had met with a better response. This is because the response to the message is none of the servant's business. That is between the individual and their God.

#### 4. The servant shares the Master's pain (Luke 10:13-16)

*"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me"* (Luke 10:13-16).

Jesus warns the seventy that although they would be doing what He was asking them to do they would meet with failure in places. This does not mean that the work was not done well or that they should give up and return. The rejection of the message would hurt, but that hurt was first felt in the heart of God. In Hosea 11:7-8, we read: *"My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zebolim? My heart churns within Me."* In this final great rejection by the nation of Israel God's heart was churned. And yet it led to His sympathy being stirred. As we serve Him, and perhaps we see little result for our labour, do we become hard hearted? In the rejection of our message we should also feel the pain in the heart of God and then our sympathy should be stirred.

We see in Luke 10:1-20 that the degree of judgment suffered by each town was based upon the revelation that they had received. Where is Capernaum now? Some have thought that there is a small town where ancient Capernaum might have been. They had every natural advantage in terms of geographical location. They had every spiritual advantage, having possibly seen and heard the Lord Jesus more than any other town. However, they rejected Him and their judgment was severe.

We in the UK have had so many advantages and have had His Word so freely available for so long. We have enjoyed a rich heritage of Christian influence and yet have largely rejected that now. Is it any wonder then that God will bring His judgment to bear upon us to prompt us to turn back to Him, or to confirm us in our guilt? How a nation treats the people of God is a key factor in that nation's prosperity - see Psalm 105:14-15.

#### 5. The servant receives the Master's praise (Luke 10:17-20)

*"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven'"* (Luke 10:17-20).

You can sense the excitement amongst the seventy. So much had happened and they all wanted their chance to tell the Lord what they had done. But what had happened is not the real story here. The Lord had an important lesson for them to learn. They were full of what they had seen - and undoubtedly it must have been spectacular. But Jesus says that He had seen something far greater! In the war against the powers of evil, Jesus, in the time before the creation of the world, had seen the destruction of the leader of wickedness so of course they would see the scattering of the foot soldiers. Jesus did not find a cause of boasting in this and, by implication, neither should His servants. But there is something even more important in His words. What really should matter to the servant is not the outward results but the inward relationship. So Jesus would gladly say, *"I and My Father are one"* (John 10:30) and He would teach His servants to rejoice that their names are written in Heaven. This can only be because the relationship between them and their God was right.

Here is the real secret to successful service. If we judge what we do by what we see, then we will inevitably fall. Either we will be swept away by pride in what we have done, or we will succumb to dejection when nothing seems to have been accomplished, or we will end up on the treadmill of always wanting more. But once we realise that what matters in service is that we are right with Him, then we can find true liberty to serve Him. The only thing that should matter to the servant is that they have done as the Master commanded and that there is therefore no problem in the relationship between Master and servant.

So next time you are involved in serving the Lord, and someone asks you how it went, perhaps you should answer that it is a wonderful thing to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour and to be accepted in Him. In politics it might be "...the economy stupid!", but in the service of the Master it is "I belong to Him and that's what counts!"

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